

NEW YORK TIMES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

FORMER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION  
(1 - 81)

Microfilming Corporation of America  
Sanford, North Carolina  
1981

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No. 5

William H. Ayers

MEMBER OF CONGRESS FROM OHIO,  
1951-1971

Microfilming Corporation of America  
Sanford, North Carolina  
1981

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

WILLIAM H. AYRES

Member of Congress from Ohio 1951 to 1971

Recorded by Charles T. Morrissey

for

FORMER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, INC.

as part of its project

THE MODERN CONGRESS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

September 13, 1978

September 21, 1978

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by

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This is one of a series of 81 oral histories micropublished as part of FORMER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION. Details about the contents of the entire series may be obtained from:

Microfilming Corporation of America  
1620 Hawkins Avenue/P.O. Box 10  
Sanford, North Carolina 27330

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## PREFACE

This oral history memoir is one in a series intended to document the experiences and reflections of the men and women who served in the United States Senate and House of Representatives in the mid-twentieth century (1922-1977).

Under the leadership of Brooks Hays of Arkansas and Walter H. Judd of Minnesota, Former Members of Congress (FMC) was organized in 1970 to help those who had served in Congress to stay in touch with each other and, more importantly, to utilize the experience of former members of the House and Senate in promoting a better understanding of the American federal system of government and especially of the Congress as an institution. Today FMC is a non-profit, non-partisan, educational membership corporation of some 560 members.

As early as 1970 Warren Cikins, first executive director of FMC, and Brooks Hays began recording interviews with Mr. Hays' former congressional colleagues. Oral history began as a program in 1973 with Basil Whitener of North Carolina as chairman of the Oral History Committee. Varying arrangements were made for recording interviews--in some instances a local history or political science professor served as interviewer, or one FMC member interviewed another. This became known as phase I of the present oral history project.

In 1976 Charles T. Morrissey became FMC's oral history consultant and in 1977, when a record number of members had left Congress, Jed Johnson, Jr., present executive director of Former Members of Congress, launched a more systematic, comprehensive set of interviews with regional professional oral historians as interviewers. In addition to Charles Morrissey (who conducted two-thirds of this set of interviews) and Fern Ingersoll (who interviewed as well as coordinated the project) the regional interviewers included Michaelyn Chou, resource librarian at the University of Hawaii; Enid Douglass, director of the Oral History Program at Claremont Graduate School in California; Ronald Grele, research director at the New Jersey Historical Commission; G. Wesley Johnson, director of the Phoenix (Arizona) History Project; John A. Neuenschwander, professor in the History Department of Carthage

College (Wisconsin); Shirley Tanzer, director of the Oregon Jewish Oral History and Archive Project; Morton Tenzer, director of the Institute of Urban Research at the University of Connecticut; and Nancy Whistler, director of oral history at the Western History Department of the Denver Public Library. Forrest Pogue, Dan Fenn, and Alton Frye served as academic advisors. This became known as phase 2, and the entire project was entitled "The Modern Congress in American History."

A grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities--part given outright and part given to match grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, Finance Factors Foundation, the Auxiliary of Former Members of Congress and individual contributions--made possible the processing of the first-phase interviews and the research, interviewing, and processing of the second-phase interviews. The grant from the Rockefeller Foundation financed interviews with fourteen former congresswomen.

In all, over one hundred former members of Congress were interviewed. For phase 2 those congressmen and congresswomen were selected who:

had the vantage point of long years of service (although some short-termers were also interviewed to get their viewpoints);

had served in party or committee leadership positions; and

were recognized by their colleagues as being particularly knowledgeable and perceptive.

Phase 1 interviewees, though self-selected, met one or more of these criteria. In phase 2 an effort was made to interview a representative number of members from House and Senate, from each of the principal parties, and from most states. Both members and non-members of FMC were interviewed.

A year's research in the Library of Congress and regional libraries preceded phase 2 interviewing. Among those working on research were Gregory Sanford (University of Vermont) and interns from the American Studies Program

at American University--William McCann, Thomas Ficarra, David Jaffe, and Deborah Carlson. To the extent that funds allowed, interviewers did additional research in the papers of the congressmen and congresswomen.\* The use of the facilities of the Congressional Research Service and the advice of its specialists greatly facilitated research.

After transcription, sufficient editing was done to ensure clarity but not to alter the spoken quality of the interview. Interviewees reviewed their transcripts, sometimes adding and occasionally subtracting material. Diane Douglas, Mary Jo Deering, Carolyn Hoffman, and Jean Tucker did much of the editing. Dorothy Bageant, Sue Urbanski, Carol McKee, and Betty Giles did most of the transcribing and final typing.

A copy of each edited transcript will be in the Library of Congress and in a regional library of the interviewee's choice. Unless an interviewee has restricted his interview transcript for a period of time it will also be in the microfiche collection of the Microfilming Corporation of America which will list all interviews in the series in its catalogue. Most of the tapes from which the transcripts were made will be in the Library of Congress although interviewees were given the choice of having the tapes of their interviews returned to them.

Charles Morrissey served as director of oral history from 1977 through 1979, but continued into 1980 to advise the coordinator on questions of editorial format, legal releases, and the like. Robert L. Peabody, who became project director in 1980, reviewed many of the transcripts. Henry P. Smith III, as counsellor,

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\*William Ayres' scrapbooks, which were in his possession, were a very valuable source of background information.

assisted with legal and financial questions. Fern Ingersoll coordinated the project, directing research and moving the transcripts through the varied states to completion. She directed the Rockefeller-funded part of the project focused on former congresswomen. Ann Brownson contributed many hours of proofreading.

Washington, D. C.  
May 12, 1980

AYRES, William Hanes, a Representative from Ohio; born in Eagle Rock, Botetourt County, Va., February 5, 1916; moved with his parents to West Virginia and later to Lorain County, Ohio; attended the Weller Township High School; was graduated from Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, in 1936; salesman for heating equipment in Akron, Ohio, 1936-1944; during World War II served as a private in the United States Army until discharged December 17, 1945; president of the Ayres Heating & Insulation Co., Akron, Ohio, since 1946; elected as a Republican to the Eighty-second and to the nine succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1951-January 3, 1971); unsuccessful candidate for reelection in 1970 to the Ninety-second Congress.

From Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971  
United States Government Printing Office, 1971

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM H. AYRES

FOR

FORMER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Session I - September 13, 1978

Place: Oral History Office in the Library of Congress,  
Washington, D.C.

Interviewer: Charles T. Morrissey

CHARLES T. MORRISSEY: Why don't we start with the obvious question of how you decided to run for Congress in the first place?

WILLIAM H. AYRES: In 1947, the East Ohio Gas Company, the largest public utility for gas distribution in Ohio, got a ruling from the Public Utilities Commission saying that no new gas installations could be installed that were in the nature of a conversion. In other words, you couldn't convert an existing coal furnace into a gas-burning furnace. Well this, of course, would have put me out of business had the ruling held, because I was in the gas conversion business; having put a gas burner on the market called the El-Van-Ayre after I got out of the army and organized my own company. I didn't see that a utility company, just on its own discretion, could get a ruling saying that they would give gas to new customers, but they wouldn't permit an existing customer to use more gas to heat his home. So, I challenged the ruling and got a temporary injunction and installed a gas burner and sort of defied the gas company to shut the customer's gas off. We got the temporary injunction and then we started through the courts, through the Court of Common Pleas where we were ruled favorably, and then the Court of Appeals. The gas company, of course, having plenty of money, carried it to the Supreme Court, and we just about had enough money to get to the Supreme Court. But, we won the decision, and in the meantime I had been installing gas burners, guaranteeing the people that we would replace their grates in the event the court ruled against us, since I was convinced, not through necessarily legal counsel, but common sense, that a utility just couldn't have that much authority, that they would have to get the legislature to rule before the P.U.C. could make such a ruling. That naturally gave us a lot of publicity as the little guy beating the big guy.

MORRISSEY: That case must have cost you a lot of money for a fellow in business by himself.

AYRES: Yes, it did. We didn't have a whole lot of money at that time, but it cost us about \$20,000. But, after we won in the Court of Appeals, the other heating contractors who were in the same business, thought, "Well, maybe this guy Ayres is right," and they did help out with some of the legal fees. And in the meantime, after we won in the Court of Appeals and had it in the Supreme Court and it looked like we would win, then they, too, were installing burners. So, although it cost us a lot of money, we made a lot of money because for a while we were the only one with the courage--if you want to use that word--to install conversion gas burners.

The publicity that resulted from that naturally made the William H. Ayres Company; and all of the veterans that I hired to run the company--the guys that were just home from World War II--finally got a break on the home front.

Then, in 1949, the very fact that we had gotten this publicity, and the little guy had won made me think to myself, "Isn't this sort of ridiculous--there are so many little guys who don't pick up the ball and run with it, that get pushed out of the box." So, I went to the late Senator [Robert A.] Taft. I told him that I would be willing to go around the state and speak as a small businessman in his behalf; and after discussing it, he said, "Well, that's fine. I appreciate it. But," he said, "have you ever thought of running for Congress?" He said, "You can't win in that district, but if you're a candidate speaking out as you want to speak out, and with the background that you have, it probably would be more effective than if you're just a small businessman." I said, "Well, how do you run for Congress?" So, he asked me if I knew the state chairman who was from Akron, and, no, I had never even heard of him, because I didn't follow politics at all. In fact, I had never voted in a primary, had never really identified myself as a Republican as such. So, I contacted the state chairman and told him that I was available and would like to run.

MORRISSEY: This was Ray Bliss?

AYRES: Ray Bliss. Ray took quite an interest in it and at that time there were several other people thinking of running. I explained to Ray my type of operation. Although I knew nothing about politics, I didn't want to get into a hassle in a primary. Ray Bliss thought that perhaps he could clear the primary, because none of the other candidates, he felt, could win, or none that would make the impression that could be made by a new face, a comparatively young person--thirty-four--small businessman, with the publicity that we had gotten for

[AYRES] defeating the East Ohio Gas Company in the court case. So, I filed in February of 1950 for Congress, and there were others who had filed or were about to file--just what Ray was able to do, I don't know, but by the time the deadline arrived for withdrawals, I was the only candidate and started the campaign early.

After the primary, in which I had no opposition, I was getting such crowds and such a reaction that I went to Senator Taft and said, "Senator, I know that you told me it was impossible for a Republican to win in my district, but I have the impression that I can make a greater impact on my own than if I'm speaking as a small businessman advocating the reelection of the 'Mr. Republican,' Senator Taft,"

MORRISSEY: He was running for the Senate then?

AYRES: For the Senate. He was running against Joe Ferguson. Well, I had also sensed, although I didn't know anything about politics, I had sensed that the contrast between Senator Taft and Joe Ferguson was such that in no way could the public possibly elect Joe Ferguson over Senator Taft. You will recall the famous remark that he made when they asked him, "What about Formosa?" He said, "I'll carry that. That's a good Democratic town." [Chuckle] And, of course, with labor getting so vicious against Taft, because the Taft-Hartley had only been on the books a little over three years at that time and it really hadn't had a chance to prove itself right or wrong from the working man's point of view, I was taking the position that perhaps the Taft-Hartley needed to be amended, that we should take a look at it. But, on the whole, it was a bill that protected the rights of the working man. And, of course, in Akron and Lorain, the two large metropolitan areas and large labor towns, the Taft-Hartley was going to be an issue. So, I said to the senator that I'd just like to sort of take off on my own. He said, "Well, that happens to candidates." He said, "I admire your enthusiasm and appreciate your candidness and we'll work together. But you go ahead and speak out as Bill Ayres, candidate for Congress." So we did, and we got a group together and I explained to Bliss that I was going to make this, sink or swim, on my own.

Of course, we didn't have the strongest Republican organization in the Akron area, but we had good, dedicated people, and with a new face coming along, I was able to rally a lot of new workers, particularly amongst the younger people who started taking an interest.

[AYRES] Well, I conceived the idea of going to the plant gates with a tape recorder and actually interviewing the workers as they came out from the plant gates. Now, you must bear in mind that back in 1950, although the tape recorders have gotten a lot of publicity since, they were a novelty, and a lot of these people would give you a very honest answer, not that they were thinking about what they were saying, they were just saying what they really believed. But what they were primarily interested in was hearing their voice back, and I would play this back over a public-address system that I had hooked up on the car so that all the people in the area could hear what Johnny Jones, shop steward; had said about the Taft-Hartley. I would actually have people waiting in line to be interviewed at the plant gates and, as I repeat, primarily to hear how they sounded, because they'd come back and say, "Is that how I really sounded?" not "What did I say?" So we made up literally hundreds of those tape recordings and then I would edit them so that I could work them into a half-hour radio show which I put on one of the local radio stations every Sunday evening. Radio time was very cheap then and we didn't have a whole lot of money to work with, but we were able to build an audience, because everyone that had been interviewed was told to listen to the program, and then they would tell all of their relatives and all of their friends, "Say, I'm going to be on the radio tonight."

In the meantime, we had dozens and dozens of laboring people, blue collar workers, many of them union officers and shop stewards, saying, "Well, I don't know too much about the Taft-Hartley. My wages haven't been cut," and I would have some rather leading questions for them to answer in that respect. So, I was able to show that the Taft-Hartley really wasn't the issue that they thought it was.

Shortly after we got into the taping of these interviews at the plant gates, the Korean War broke out and then I could see that that became the issue, and having been a veteran who had employed all veterans, it was a natural for us to talk about the Korean War. In the research that I was able to do on my opponent, Walter Huber, I discovered that he had been to Korea in 1949, and when he came back, in a discussion of the foreign aid bill on the floor, John Vorys of Ohio had asked him if, while he was in Korea--and this was in the spring of '50, prior to the breakout of the Korean War--if he had heard any rumors coming out of MacArthur's headquarters to the effect that war might be close at hand, and Walter replied to Vorys that "If all the rumors coming out of

[AYRES] MacArthur's headquarters were laid end to end, it would be a good thing," and that there was nothing to it.

Well, of course, two months after Walter made that great statement, we had the Korean War on our hands, so I was able just to take that one little sentence and ask on our tapes, "What would you think of a man who had spent the taxpayers' money to take a junket to Korea and then answered a serious question as he did on the floor of the Congress?" I had those reprints made up from the Congressional Record quoting Walter. Well, Walter tried to laugh it off, but it was no laughing matter because at that point very few people even knew where Korea was, but when the war was actually on and their own sons and husbands were leaving for battle in a far distant land, it was quite an issue, and it became very apparent that we were on the upswing.

MORRISSEY: Did you and Huber have a chance to debate at all publicly?

AYRES: No. Walter ignored me completely, and probably justifiably so, because after all, he had won by 36,000 votes in 1948 and here was a young upstart with no following--Republicans supposedly didn't have much strength--and he just ignored me. Had Walter come back and really campaigned, I wouldn't have won because, as it was, we wouldn't have won had there not been a third candidate in the race.

MORRISSEY: That's the fellow named [Robert] Brenneman?

AYRES: Yes, Brenneman.

MORRISSEY: I wanted to ask you about that. Where did he come from, and why did he draw as many votes as he did?

AYRES: Well, he was a very active fellow and very articulate, very much to the left; and I think there was a nucleus of maybe five to ten thousand people who agreed with his positions and didn't know Huber, and he catered to that extreme left element which normally would have gone to Huber, not to me. But with Brenneman in the race, he apparently didn't think he could win, but he was dedicated to his principles and he put on quite a personal campaign amongst the laboring class who were a little bit to the left of center.

MORRISSEY: Does Akron have a history of labor radicalism? Is there a core of people who would vote for a leftist candidate?

AYRES: Well, they didn't necessarily have a history of it, but you did have an element in the labor movement that was pretty extreme and that was the group that he picked up. Plus the fact that the name was pretty well-known in Medina County, because there was a large drug-store there by that name and he did pull a lot more votes in Medina County than they ever thought he would, which may have been cast by some of the Democrats who thought he was from this very highly regarded family, to which he had no connection.

Then the other thing that assisted me in Lorain County was that the most popular political figure in Lorain County was named Frank Ayres, and he had been the auditor for years--no relation--and my son's name was Frank, and I was using the children in the campaign to good advantage. I had T-shirts made up for them, and back then, of course, T-shirts weren't used so much in campaigning--I guess we were probably one of the first ones. But I had the kids running around with these T-shirts on that said, BILL AYRES IS MY DADDY, and then we'd go into Lorain County and I'd say, "This is my son, Frank." "Oh, I know your grandfather," people would say. I never bothered to explain that there was a difference in the Ayres families. But a lot of people thought there was a connection between Bill Ayres and Frank Ayres, the auditor, because we carried Lorain County far more than anyone ever thought we would, by five thousand votes. Of course, in winning by only two thousand in the whole election, that could have had a bearing on it also.

MORRISSEY: Did Huber stay in Washington because the Congress was genuinely in session and he had to, or did he feel that was the best way to campaign?

AYRES: He felt that I wasn't making any inroads and there was a poll taken in September that showed him way ahead, and he used his Washington activities as an excuse. But there wasn't any reason why, for the whole month of October, he couldn't have been back campaigning very strongly. When he came back, he met with the union leaders, had lunch with them, and everybody told him everything was fine, and he sort of ignored it. But he could have come back and campaigned and said, "Look, we're in trouble with the Democrats," and spent more time in Lorain County where the steel workers were strong, and he could have won the election.

MORRISSEY: Did you have any formal, official labor support?

AYRES: No, no. No labor organizations at all were for us. But they really weren't fighting me too much. They, too, were ignoring me because they were concentrating on Taft, which was another factor that helped in our election because Taft got out the vote on the Republican side, or on the conservative side, and labor got out their vote. But they were concentrating on the vote for Ferguson and they really thought Huber was taking care of himself, that that wasn't any problem. Had Taft not been running--there were so many factors involved in the winning of it--had Taft not been running, we probably couldn't have won; had Huber come back and campaigned, we couldn't have won; had Brenneman not been in the race, we couldn't have won. And with all due respect to our own workers, had they not been as dedicated, we wouldn't have won.

MORRISSEY: What comes through the daily portrait of your campaign is the hard work, the aggressiveness, the constant meeting of people, the advertising.

AYRES: Yes, it all had a bearing on it, and Walter Huber was a little negative in his criticism. He did make an issue of my ads and, in retrospect, I would have done the same thing had I been in his position. The name of my corporation was William H. Ayres, Incorporated, and so, in order to conserve money and at the same time keep the business alive in the event that I lost the election--although I never felt that I would--I was sort of protecting myself, to keep the business going, and kept up the advertising for the business. But I sort of combined the two. We ran ads that said, "X marks the spot for good heating." And then we had a ballot at the bottom of the ad which said, "X--William H. Ayres, Incorporated--representative to good heating," and ran those ads three and four times a week in the local Akron Beacon Journal. Well, it got to the point where I knew they were catching on, not so much because I saw they were promoting the heating company, but because in my interviews with the man on the street and at the plant gates, they'd say, "Oh, yes, yes, I voted for you before. I remember marking the 'X' there in front of William H. Ayres." Well, they hadn't at all, but they say reputation is nothing more than repetition, and they had seen that "X" in front of William H. Ayres--and we did make the "Incorporated" very small--and then instead of "Representative to Congress"--"Representative to Good Heating." It was just as close as you could come to duplicating a ballot without having the exact words on it.

[AYRES] Well, Walter didn't raise the issue so much about the ad as that I should have to pay the political rate. Well, then, that just got a lot more people looking for the ad.

MORRISSEY: As I recall, that was a disputed election.

AYRES: Yes. With the three men in the race--Ayres, Huber, Brenneman--they set up the voting machines in Lorain County and at that time voting machines weren't that old, and Lorain County was the only area in the district that had voting machines. In setting up the ballot they took the names alphabetically, so it was Ayres, Brenneman, and Huber. Huber stood out by itself, more or less, because the two spaces were there and the third space was Huber. Well, he made no issue of it prior to voting. But after the voting, and this had a bearing on the '52 election, Walter contested the election on the basis that the public didn't know who they were voting for and they just voted for the first name, which was Ayres. Well, that, of course, right or wrong, was an insult to the voters, and Walter making the issue that he did in carrying it through the House election and challenging it, was able to put himself in the position where I could say that he was nothing but a crybaby, and he was insulting the intelligence of the voter; and that had a big bearing on the election in '52 when he ran again and we defeated him overwhelmingly. The public said, "What's Huber yelling about? I know who I voted for." And it hurt him. It would have hurt him even more but in the meantime they had redistricted and they took Lorain and Portage Counties away from me.

MORRISSEY: So the district became more Republican?

AYRES: More Democratic.

MORRISSEY: Oh, more Democratic?

AYRES: From my point of view, from the votes that I had gotten, because Summit County, where Akron was located, was very Democratic and very large, and Medina County was Republican and very small, so the district actually became more Democratic. But people that Walter had insulted were the Lorain County people where the voting machines were, and they didn't get a chance to vote in '52 for or against me because they had been redistricted out of the 14th congressional district at that time.

MORRISSEY: Did you have any influence on how re-districting was done?

AYRES: None whatsoever. In fact, I stayed out of it and the only comment that I made was that I certainly would hate to lose the good people of Lorain and Portage counties, but that we would just concentrate on the smaller area and it might be easier for me to campaign because the district would be smaller geographically. I never took a position on it because I didn't know which way it was going to go and I certainly didn't want to say, "Well, take those people, or take part of Summit County, or take this group," because then if they're back with you, your opponent can always say, "Well, he said he didn't want you, so why should you vote for him?"

MORRISSEY: Was the legislature in Ohio Republican at that time?

AYRES: It was Republican at that time. But they had no alternative to redistricting, because I had one of the largest districts in the country in 1950. There were 750,000 people in the district, so there was no reason why they shouldn't redistrict. In fact, I thought at the time it was very fair, the way they did it, to make Summit County and Medina one district and they were geographically contiguous, so it was the logical thing. I had no objections to it.

MORRISSEY: Let me go back to T-shirts and tape recorders, particularly tape recorders, because those of us in oral history are interested in the technology that makes all this possible. Oral history actually started at Columbia University in May of 1948 before there were either tape recorders or wire recorders. The interviews were recorded by a graduate student sitting on the fringes of the conversation. And then in '49, they used wire recorders, and then about the time you were running for Congress they were using tape recorders, tape recorders being on the market only barely by that time. So, whoever had the inspiration for using tape recorders was right on top of a very recent technological development.

AYRES: Well, I didn't realize that it was so new until a few years later but, in fact, the tape recorder that I had didn't have the same speed as the tape machines in the radio studio, so I had a lot of work to do. I had to take my tape and play it and then put it over onto the other tape so that they could make it up into the half-hour show. But I presume the thing that intrigued me about the recorder was the fact that people were so interested in hearing their voices. I had experimented with this at home with our salesmen, and that's how I really started using the machines.

MORRISSEY: Is that where the inspiration came from?

AYRES: Yes. I had put a furnace in for an appliance dealer who had these new gadgets, tape recording machines, and I thought, "Well, now, this will be a good thing to have the salesman hear how lousy he really sounds when he's making his presentation to sell one of my gas burners." So, I had these sessions with them. I'd actually had the machine in '49, so it had to be one of the first ones. Then, from that, when I got into the political campaign, I thought, "Now, well, this is going to be a great thing to find out what these people are really thinking and let them know how they sound." And then, from that, it was putting it into the radio package so that I could build up an audience even though it might have only been a few thousand people. When you won by two thousand votes, who knows what made the difference?

And, of course, lots of times at the nationality picnics--and we have twenty-three organized nationality groups--I would take the tape recording machine there and, of course, have the children standing there saying, "Bill Ayres is my daddy," and they'd be passing out the matches, and my oldest daughter, who at that time was twelve, was able to say, "Don't you want to hear your voice on the machine daddy has?" and . . .

[END SIDE 1, TAPE I  
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE I]

[AYRES] The man would say what he really thought of you in no uncertain terms and then when you played it back--and, of course, you could amplify it as I say--some of his friends would tell him off then, "Oh, what's the matter with you, you dumb Polak? You shouldn't talk like that to him." So it made it very interesting.

MORRISSEY: As I recall from [Stephen] Bailey's book, Congress at Work, the Republican National Committee sent somebody out to your district.

AYRES: Yes, they sent a gentleman out. I believe his name was Hogan, and he worked with me for about a week and he was quite intrigued with how this machine attracted the interested. And then I gave him a tape and he in turn sent it to Chuck Brownson. He thought Chuck had the personality and with the type of campaign he was running this would work. And Chuck used the tape recorder then after I sent him this sample of what I was doing. I sent him one of the copies that I had used on the radio.

MORRISSEY: That's right. He was running in Indianapolis at the same time you were running in Akron.

AYRES: That's right. Then he was elected. He defeated a Democrat. I've been surprised that they haven't used the man-on-the-street approach more than they have. Of course, tape recorders are so common now there isn't that interest in hearing how you sound, with every kid practically running around carrying one.

MORRISSEY: True. It's become a very common Christmas present.

AYRES: Right.

MORRISSEY: T-shirts are so much of the current scene it's hard to believe that in 1950 it was a new idea to publicize your candidacy by inscribing something on a T-shirt.

AYRES: Yes, some of the old guard thought it was a little too corny. And then, of course, in the second campaign we passed out thousands of T-shirts--and used them for ten, twelve years afterwards--which said, BILL AYRES IS MY CONGRESSMAN.

We had an interesting thing at one of the parks-- and I never did figure out who pulled this joke on me, but it was pretty clever. The kids used the T-shirts for about three campaigns that said BILL AYRES IS MY DADDY. After my oldest daughter started developing, she objected to the wearing of the T-shirt, but at this one general labor picnic at Summit Beach Park, there was this very dark-complected fellow who I always thought perhaps pulled this trick. But, there was a nice clean-cut little black boy walking down the midway, and on his T-shirt it said, BILL AYRES IS MY DADDY. Someone had screened out the shirt, [laughter] and put it on him. I didn't know what to do about it exactly--so I got the little fellow aside and gave him one that said, BILL AYRES IS MY CONGRESSMAN. It was a rough screening job, but someone either had a great sense of humor or was trying to embarrass the congressman. (Laughter.)

MORRISSEY: When you came to Washington, did you have any expectation you'd be here for twenty years?

AYRES: No, none whatsoever. However, after I was here a short time, it became very apparent to me that it was absolutely necessary that I get the constructive things that I wanted to do off the track early.

MORRISSEY: Why is that so?

AYRES: Because I wouldn't have much time in the two-year period to establish myself, and it being a Democratic district, it could swing the other way very easily. And, of course, I had no idea that Walter Huber's contesting the election would have the effect that it did. When you've won by only nineteen hundred votes out of over 200,000--it was just a fraction of a percentage point victory--anything could happen. So, having been active in the employment of veterans in my business and with the Korean War on, the hottest issue that I was interested in the first month I was here in 1951 was the Korean War and the draft. At that time we had a very unfortunate draft law. It was sort of catch-as-catch-can. You might get called up and you might not. There wasn't any plan, really.

In talking during the campaign and seeing the concern that there was among the parents, and also the young people, I thought, "We've got to do something about this draft." So, I conceived the idea early to hold symposiums with the high school seniors, the boys, in all of the counties in my district. And the more I got into it, the more constructive I saw that it was, and at the same time, it was going to give me a chance to show that I was really interested in this problem.

MORRISSEY: How would you do that, Bill--during school hours, on school grounds?

AYRES: I contacted the superintendents of schools in all of the counties and told them what I had in mind and they thought it was a good idea. So then I could see that there was enough interest in it that maybe this was something that one of the national magazines would like to cover. Through the Republic Steel people in Lorain who had connections, because they had done advertising or knew the people, I contacted Life magazine and told them what I wanted to do and, would they be interested in covering it? Well, they were. So when I set up the meeting, they decided Lorain would be better than Akron because it was a town with one high school and it had a great mix of nationality groups, blacks and so forth, and a real cross-section of America. I set up the meeting in Lorain and Life magazine sent their crew in ahead of time, interviewed the seniors, stayed over and talked to them that evening, and then in April of '51, that was their lead story in Life magazine.

Well, that not only cemented my relationships with the parents--here's a fellow who's just been in Congress

[AYRES] a couple of months and Life magazine is interested in him, they not knowing, of course, that I had done everything I could to get them to cover it. But it had another effect. It attracted the attention of my colleagues who also saw that something ought to be done on this draft situation, because you got kids asking you, "What should I do? Should I volunteer, or should I take my chances?" and I was advising them to go ahead and get it over with and then take advantage of the GI Bill and so forth and so on. This was a very dangerous position to take, to some extent, because here you're telling a kid to go to war; but on the other hand, his chances of going anyway were pretty good so he might as well leave all of the indecision and the tension and the unrest and go ahead and get it over with.

I would explain the benefits of the GI Bill and how I proposed to expand those benefits and make it more advantageous--come back and get your free education and get your home and get established. And, of course, during the questions that these kids would ask, it was really heartwarming to see that maybe you were being able to help them. As one kid said, "Well, suppose I get my notice and I don't look at it. Will I still be called up?"--and "Yes, you will," and so forth and so on.

It was quite a story, a three-page spread in Life magazine with me talking to the mothers and the kids asking the questions, and so forth. One of the older editors said that he was going to take a look at what had happened to these kids after twenty-five years. This would have been if Life had not gone out of business and, I presume, if I had still been in Congress.

?MORRISSEY: That idea occurred to me.

AYRES: But they never followed it up. It would be very interesting to see, because I think there were about one hundred boys in the class, as I recall. Although I did get some interesting letters from some of the fellows who had volunteered, who had gone ahead and gone in, and wrote me how grateful they were for the advice that I gave them. I recall one letter in particular that I got from a fellow who was down at Ohio State. He had gotten out and was in college, studying pre-medicine, and wrote how grateful he was that his army experience helped him grow up and now he was getting his education which his father, who was a steel-mill worker, wouldn't have been able to help him with, but with the part-time job he had and the GI Bill, he was going to . . .

MORRISSEY: Did that boomerang on you at all in the sense that some kids did go out and get killed?

AYRES: Yes. I had one situation which was very, very bad. It concerned a fellow, not from Lorain, but from the Akron area--I held these in Akron also. That was pretty sad because the parents blamed me because the boy had gone in based on my recommendation, and unfortunately he was killed. It was sad from two points of view, one, it was really negligence on the boy's part--he wasn't killed in action; he was killed in the grenade training program. He was playing around with the pin. But, nevertheless, he was there because at least I had recommended it. Of course, who knows, he might have been drafted the next week anyway. That's the chance you take whenever you make a decision on a recommendation. You can always find yourself in a little difficulty.

MORRISSEY: What would be the format of these symposia? Would you lead them yourself?

AYRES: Yes. Yes, I would make a presentation explaining the present law, and then explaining the benefits of being a veteran, and then open it up to questions. Life magazine was there with their cameras and would record the questions and answers.

MORRISSEY: You were a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee?

AYRES: Yes. I requested to become a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee. I didn't realize at the time that you didn't have to make that request. You could get that without any problem at all. But I felt that was something that I knew and I wasn't at all familiar with interior and insular affairs, or education and labor. It wasn't until I had been here three terms that I requested the Education and Labor Committee. The reason I requested that was because I had this large labor district and I felt that I was getting myself established in 1956 we had won by a sizeable margin against a very able opponent. I had a nucleus of blue-collar workers by that time who were working with me, not the union leadership--and I felt that perhaps I could make a contribution in the labor field.

MORRISSEY: How did you develop that blue-collar support?

AYRES: Personal service. People had problems with their social security, they had immigration problems, they had income tax problems. I had established--and I presume this is dating back to my business operation--I had a

[AYRES] belief in service. In fact, our slogan for the campaign was, "He Gives Real Service," and we made certain that their problems were either handled or we explained in detail to them why they couldn't get what they wanted. Even before the Congress gave monies to operate the local offices, I used a part of what my heating company office was and went home every weekend and had office hours. Now, of course, here twenty-seven years later, it's common practice. They have mobile units traveling around the district. But it was the service to the blue-collar people, and they're the ones who turned to their congressman for help more quickly and there are more of them, so the word gradually spread by the end of four terms, "Well, if you want action, call Bill Ayres." That, of course, in itself--the problems that arose, the situations that came up, the personal problems that they would bring to the congressman--that would make a book in itself if you wanted to go into all the details.

One of the most interesting ones--a mother and father and daughter came in. This fellow was a preacher from West Virginia and he had heard of me through someone who had been invited to Akron by me who had relatives there in the West Virginia Society. Now, in Akron, it is said that there are more people from West Virginia than there are in Charleston, West Virginia, the capital. They came up to work in the rubber plants. And in the first campaign in 1950, I had had a radio show which was hillbilly music, primarily aimed at the West Virginia audience, and this station was strong enough to carry into some areas of West Virginia. So, I had a contest in which the person living in West Virginia who had the most relatives in Akron was going to get invited to the Soap Box Derby, free, at my expense. Well, that attracted more interest. We got thousands of names and addresses of people living in Akron who were from West Virginia, and then we in turn wrote them a letter and I went to the West Virginia picnic, and so forth.

MORRISSEY: That must be a huge picnic.

AYRES: Yes, it was, thousands of people. Then these people came up from West Virginia, we put them up in a hotel and they got to see the Soap Box Derby, and it was a big deal. Well, this country preacher had heard that Bill Ayres is nice to West Virginians. He drove up from West Virginia and came in the office, he and his wife and their daughter. The problem was that their daughter wanted to get married.

When the conversation first started out, I was under the impression that she wanted to get her husband home from

[AYRES] the navy for the birth of her child, which seemed imminent. It was very obvious that the young lady was not going to be carrying the child for many more weeks. Well, as it turned out, it wasn't that she wanted to get her husband home from the navy. She wanted to get her boyfriend home from the navy so that this child would not be born out of wedlock. And her father, the preacher, said, "Now, I know you'll understand this, Bill. You have a reputation for helping people." He said, "If he knows her condition, he will want to get married." Well, I thought to myself, having known a few sailors in my time, "This kid's out to sea for a reason and he's not about to come back." But I pursued it, and got in touch with the CO down at Norfolk and explained the situation. He said, "Well, he's just out here ten or fifteen miles on maneuvers. I guess we can get him in here. I don't know whether we can . . . we have no control over that. You understand, Congressman." I said, "I understand, but you will have done your part and I will have done my part in explaining the situation to him, that his girlfriend is just a few weeks away from having the baby and if he wants to marry her, you give him the permission to come to land, and the father and mother and the young lady, they'll be in Norfolk." He said, "I'll bring him back." So they brought him back, they got married, had the baby, and I had the nicest note from her. Ironically, they named it Bill [chuckle], and I swear, I had never seen the young lady [laughter] before she came in the office.

But they all didn't work out that way. We had another situation where a lady came in with two kids--it was at the office at one of my Saturday morning meetings--and it was pathetic. She was as poor as a churchmouse. The kids were dirty, noses running, and she was very unkempt. They were trying to get along on \$90 a month she got from her sailor husband and she had taken her last dollars, I think, to come down to the office in a taxicab. So I thought, after listening to her story, "This is really sad. If we're taking fellows, leaving a home situation like this, what's going to happen to the country if you multiply that by thousands of people." So I went to their home to see just what the situation was, and it was terrible--just a little three-room shack out in Sawyer Wood, which was a rough section of town, nothing but an oil-burning portable heater to heat the place. Granted, she wasn't very tidy, the place was a mess. I thought, "Well, maybe she's gone to pieces since her husband has gone to sea." So I told her I would proceed to see if we could get a hardship discharge for him. I wrote the commanding officer and I explained the situation, told him I had taken a personal interest in this, and unless the future of America depended on this man being in the navy, that I felt that he should be granted a hardship discharge, and that I normally didn't

[AYRES] interfere in such situations because I realized that the navy had its problems and so forth, and that he had enlisted, but the situation perhaps had changed at home and he was needed there. Also, I had learned that he was a sheet-metal worker and, if necessary, I could have provided him employment--maybe not at a high wage, but at least a living wage, much better than what he was doing--in the local area.

Well, I got a letter back from the CO [Commanding Officer]--and I always felt that he enjoyed writing this letter very much because the military do not like congressional interference. They're running the military and you're running the legislative branch--you stay out of our affairs since we don't mingle with yours. Apparently the CO, through channels, had had this sailor in for a discussion and the sailor apparently was told that the congressman had talked to his wife and had been out to his home, the situation was very, very bad, and he was needed at home. Apparently the sailor had said, "The congressman from Akron, Ohio, went out to my house and now he's saying that I should get a discharge to go home?" And the CO apparently said, "That's correct, sailor." And the sailor apparently said to the CO, "Well, you tell that congressman to mind his own damned business. Why the hell does he think I joined the navy?" The sailor was right. What right did I have to interfere with his decision? And I got literally hundreds of requests from service wives to get their husbands home. But I learned a lesson early in the game. From that time on, I never made a request of the military to have them release a man unless I got the request from the man direct.

MORRISSEY: What are some of the other instances of trying to provide constituent service that have an interesting or anecdotal twist to them?

AYRES: Well, there were so many situations that arose. And, of course, some of it wasn't necessarily service, it was just your normal routine operation. The government prints up an awful lot of publications that people want--agricultural yearbooks--I think now they get five hundred. At that time, the big thing when we first came to Congress was an orientation course to tell you what to do to get reelected. Even before you were sworn in they were telling you how to get reelected, what things you should be doing.

MORRISSEY: Who would run that?

AYRES: The Congressional Campaign Committee. They'd tell you what was available and so forth, in the way of publications, bulletins, agricultural bulletins

[AYRES] and so forth. And then some of the older members would tell you the things that they did.

There was one thing that I made a mistake on that I corrected very quickly. One of the senior members told me that he found it very helpful to have his office send letters of condolence to all the poor widows who were left behind without their husbands. They'd take the obituary page and write a letter. "Dear Mrs. So-and-So, I'm sorry to learn about the passing of John. I hope everything is all right with you. If there are any problems about your Social Security or anything, I'm here to help you." Well, it sounded all right. So, I took the obituary page out of the Akron Beacon Journal, as a starting point, and I would compose what I thought was a very nice letter which would be appropriate for any situation. But I got a letter back from one woman and she was very blunt. She said, "Dear Congressman: I received your letter expressing your sympathy regarding the passing of my late husband, John. [Paragraph] If you had known how mean that S.O.B. was to me, you would have sent me a letter congratulating me on being rid of the bastard." [Laughter.] Well, I thought, "You'll get yourself into a lot of trouble here, Bill, by expressing sympathy when you don't know the situation at all." So we cut that out.

But we did proceed with mailing the baby books, which made a big hit; and the little food-care books, cookbooks, made a big hit. I sent the cookbooks to all of the newly-weds where the marriage license appeared in the paper, and sent the baby books to all of the births. I had one girl back home who was doing this--sort of running errands. She was my local representative. Her husband was actually the one getting paid because he was a disabled veteran, his eyes were bad, and she helped him out. Well, I wouldn't have known about a little mix-up if I hadn't received a letter from a fellow who had just gotten married. It turned out that I knew him. He wrote me this letter and he said, "Dear Bill: Thanks so much for sending Mary and me the baby book. I hope that it will come in handy. But how the hell did you know?" I thought, "Well, this is funny. Here Charlie's sending me this letter and he just got married, and how the hell did I know that he had to get married?" Well, in checking into it, I found out that the girl had mixed up the lists. She had sent a whole list of baby books to the newlyweds, and the cookbooks to those who had had the children. [Laughter.] So we corrected that situation. But we didn't stop sending the baby books; we just made certain that the lists were correct.

[END SIDE 2, TAPE I  
BEGIN SIDE I, TAPE III]

MORRISSEY: With respect to, as somebody put it once years ago, Akron being the capital of West Virginia, did you at any time have an opponent who was a West Virginian running against you?

AYRES: No. In fact I had more West Virginia ties than any opponent I could have had because my father started out as a circuit rider in Virginia, and then he went over into West Virginia to hold a revival at Eckles, West Virginia, where he met my mother who was a Christian Missionary Alliance nurse working for the coal company in Eckles. This made a very interesting story for West Virginians because Mother had so much power through the coal company that when Dad came in to pitch his tent to hold his revival, she had him run out of town, because the coal company owned all the land and she said, "Unh, unh. I don't want that young preacher coming in here interfering with my work. This is my territory. Get him out of here." So Dad took his horse and tent and had to get out of town. But he was curious to find out who this upstart woman was with all this authority, so he went back to try to compromise the situation and, as the story goes, he came up to talk to Mother and Mother said, "If you want to talk to me, fine, because you can be chopping wood while you're talking." So she got her winter supply of wood split. [Chuckle.] Dad convinced her that he should hold a revival. Well, she was impressed with this young man who was just out of Asbury College in Kentucky and she let him pitch his tent, and she thought he was sincere. So that's how they met. I felt I had very close ties to the West Virginia people, which was very helpful because they understood that situation, the West Virginians did, because they knew that the coal company owned the town and that the nurse who was in charge was a pretty powerful woman because she was the minister and the medical advisor. And, of course, Mother had very interesting stories to tell about her experiences as a young woman in her late twenties working for the mining company with the miners. So it gave me a little tie. I had closer connections with West Virginia than any of the candidates that I ran against.

MORRISSEY: Were there other ways in which you tried to cultivate that West Virginia vote besides going to the picnics and having the radio broadcasts?

AYRES: On a one-on-one basis with their problems, just understanding the situation and having them feel free to tell me the whole story, let it all hang out. Just like the preacher who came up with his pregnant daughter. Who would think today--seeing Congress with all of its pomp and ceremony--that a member of Congress would take an interest in getting a sailor home to marry a pregnant woman? But no problem was too trivial or too small for them to bring to you, and they brought them.

MORRISSEY: There's a famous little anecdote in a well-known book by Samuel Lubell called The Future of American Politics, which was written in the early 1950s, about the importance of ethnicity and nationality groups in American politics. The story he's telling is about a judge in Akron who had a man in his court and the judge sentenced him to go back to West Virginia--you probably heard this--so the headline in the Akron paper was, "Judge Sentences Man to West Virginia." Of course, in the next election the judge lost his job.

AYRES: No, you don't joke about West Virginia. I had an interesting West Virginia piece of correspondence which dealt with the mails and made quite a hit in Akron. It was a very silly thing, but it was very important to the man. This fellow was going to do his brother-in-law a big favor by sending him some cultivated fish worms that he had made in Barberton, Ohio, which was just outside of Akron. He grew fish worms and his brother liked to fish in the creeks down in West Virginia. He was going to go down himself, and he mailed this package marked "Live Bait." But it didn't get there until four days and all of the fish worms were dead. "Now, what kind of a postal service do we have, Bill?" Well, we had an investigation and it made big news because I could see the gimmickry of it. What happened to John's worms? They checked out Ravenswood and everybody down there was madder than hell because the worms didn't get there for the opening of fishing season. So the West Virginians knew I understood their problem because I was able to say I had fished in those creeks and I know how important it is, and why should some clerk in the post office ignore this clearly marked live bait? Don't they understand what live bait is in Barberton? They do in West Virginia. [Laughter.]

MORRISSEY: You mentioned--I think the number's twenty-three--nationality groups in your district that had organizations?

AYRES: Yes.

MORRISSEY: To what extent was it important for the congressman to be in touch with those groups?

AYRES: Oh, from a Republican's point of view it was mandatory because percentage-wise they were Democrats, and percentage-wise they were union members. And that was one way you could infiltrate the direction that the union leader was trying to give to the union member, because he could say, "Well, Bill and his family came out to our picnic. There's no way they could tell me that he's not interested in us." And it was very important that

[AYRES] you cultivate the picnic circuit. In fact, most of my people whom I organized later on, Democrats for Ayres, were actually the nationality people and you never failed to attend their affairs. In one instance, I recall I was invited over to Rome and we had a tour of the summer place of the pope and I was able to get a lot of the trinkets. Being a Protestant I didn't understand exactly the meaning that this held for the Catholic people, particularly the Italians, but when I was able to go back to the Columbus Day banquet that year and present the monsignor with something that had been blessed by the pope and the head of the Italian society, the Calabrese, that made quite an impact. And then, of course, the one fellow who was sort of the ringleader of the Italian picnic-organizing group, got the biggest kick out of the umbrella I gave him. I said, "Now I don't understand all of the ramifications of this, but I understand that when you have an audience with the pope"--and this was not a private audience, this was a group of us that went in--"that everything in your possession is automatically blessed." I said, "It was raining that day and I had purchased this fine Italian umbrella from one of the stands while we were waiting in line to go in for our audience with the pope. And I brought this home with me here tonight. I want Joe Sica to have it because, Joe, this is the only holy umbrella that doesn't leak." And I was a little dubious as to how he would accept it.

MORRISSEY: That could have been a fatal pun.

AYRES: But that was really the thing that they enjoyed, and at Joe's death--I went to his funeral--and it was a rainy day, and, believe it or not, his widow had that umbrella, and after Joe was put six feet under, she came over to me and she said, "Bill, this has been a lot of strength to me today."

MORRISSEY: Was there rivalry among the various groups carried over from the other side?

AYRES: No. They were segregated. You had a little rivalry within the nationality groups amongst themselves, because, you see, when the people came over here from Europe, if a half-dozen came from a little town up in the mountains of Italy, then they organized their club, and then a little group came from outside of Rome and they organized their club. So you had various Italian clubs within the Italian community. You also had the same thing with the Polish people. You had the same thing with the Hungarian groups because you had some of the Hungarians who were orthodox Protestants, others were Catholics.

[AYRES] We had friction within the Serbian community. Some were the pro-Titos, some were the anti-Titos. You had the Croatians; you had the Russians; you had the Germans; you had the big Sons of Herman club, and then you had the Manechor club--and although they were all Germans, they were just a little different. But there was no friction between the Poles and the Hungarians or between the Italians and the Croatians; it was within their own group.

MORRISSEY: And it behooves the congressman to know about that?

AYRES: Oh, absolutely. You don't get up at the Croatian group and praise Tito when the king from Yugoslavia has been exiled. In fact, I cringed, just cringed, could have crawled under the couch, the night Jerry Ford, President Ford, made that blunder which was unbelievable. Because of my experience with the nationality groups, I knew exactly how that was going to strike them and how the president had a slip of the tongue. I know exactly what he meant and any one of us who was familiar with the nationality groups could have said the same thing. I don't think President Ford was--he didn't have that many nationality groups in Grand Rapids or he never would have said it, because all he had to say in answer to that question, "Well, their hearts are for the freedom of expression," and so forth and so on, and "given the opportunity, we hope to work for that because I know where their hearts are. Their hearts are for a free society," and so forth. "And it's unfortunate. No one can correct that overnight. We're not going to war, and they wouldn't want that in Poland, over this issue right now; but we are going to be working for it and I intend to insist that conferences in Helsinki," and so forth. That's all he had to say and he would have been a hero. To say that there's no obstruction of freedom there, or words to that effect, is very, very bad. No one running in a nationality district would make that mistake.

MORRISSEY: As I recall, in 1960 John Kennedy didn't run as well as he hoped to in Akron since it's a labor town, because it was also a Protestant town.

AYRES: Yes. I think that had some bearing on it because you had a large congregation at the Akron Baptist Temple, which was run by Dr. Billington who was a self-educated individual who came up from Paducah, Kentucky, and worked in the rubber plants and started this branch of the Southern Baptists. Although they were not openly preaching from the pulpit anti-Catholic, it was very apparent that a lot of your Southern Baptists were

[AYRES] anti-Catholic. I think that had some bearing on it. In fact, in my election of '54, I ran against John Smith who--actually his name wasn't Smith; it had been changed by his parents. I think his name had been Piatrovitch, he was of Hungarian background. But John had a good legislative background. He'd been in the state legislature and he'd also been national commander of the veterans' AMVETS organization. But John, I think, probably made a mistake by emphasizing the fact that he was Catholic. He made such a point of it, thinking he would solidify the nationalities where I had made quite a few inroads, that he alienated Dr. Billington to the point that I think, for the first time, Dr. Billington endorsed me publicly from the pulpit. And I was concerned, concerned to the extent that I had Gus and Kitty O'Brien, who were very well-known young Catholics, manage my campaign because I could see that John was going to make that the issue and I certainly didn't want it to be an issue. But it was a very close race.

MORRISSEY: Well, you won 82,000 to 68,000. It was a very strong Democratic year, '54.

AYRES: In '54, yes. And John Smith was a very, very able opponent. He looked like many people think a congressman should. He was prematurely grey and, of course, he spoke very fluent Hungarian. I had some Hungarians at the time who told me, "Well, Bill, I can't be with you this time. I was with you last time, but I've got to give John a chance."

MORRISSEY: You survived three very strong Democratic years. Fifty-four was one, '58 another, and '64, of course. Any explanation?

AYRES: Well, in '58--what were the years you mentioned?

MORRISSEY: Well, in '58 you ran against Jack Arnold but you beat him 114,000 to 76,000--a substantial margin.

AYRES: Yes, well, Jack wasn't the strongest candidate. But I was very, very disappointed in Senator Bricker and Billy O'Neil getting as involved as they did in the right-to-work issue. That was on the ballot in '58 and I took the position that although it was a state issue, I felt that the Taft-Hartley should be amended and that the right-to-work provision should be taken out because it was a phony issue to begin with. But Bricker and O'Neil made that the issue and I ironically tried to help Bricker. I could see that Arnold wasn't making any impact. Jack was a nice fellow, but he wasn't the most aggressive candidate that they could have had. At the rally that I had in the

[AYRES] latter part of the campaign I turned out to be for Bricker because I knew that John was going to lose overwhelmingly.

We had had a public debate with the two state senators and Jack Arnold and myself met with the press--an interview type of thing--and I could tell then that the labor people there were a little confused because they just couldn't generate a lot of opposition to me on this particular issue which I would be able to do nothing about at the state level, and that's what it involved. It was a state issue. But, nevertheless, I said, "The place to handle it really is not state by state, but down in Washington, and I'm on the Labor Committee." That was the first time being on the Labor Committee was really an advantage to me. "But, if you can get the Democratic chairman, Graham Barden, to let this out of the committee, you have a friend in me in trying to get it through the Republican side." And, of course, I was on sound ground because Barden wasn't about to permit that to come out of the committee. But how could labor fight me when "here's a fellow who's on our side in this issue?"

And then in '64, I presume the thing that was most helpful there was the fact that President Johnson and Lady Bird Johnson and three or four members of the cabinet--it was an overkill--came to the district. I was running against a very able young lady, Frances McGovern, who was in the state legislature, a very highly regarded single lady, and they thought, "Well, here's a new twist." It was the first time that they'd put a woman up against me and they had her well financed. They thought, "Well, all we have to do, with Goldwater being as unpopular as he is, is to tie Ayres up with Goldwater and then let the president come in"--which he agreed to do, because at that time Johnson wasn't too pleased with some of the things I was doing on the Labor Committee with his Great Society programs and so forth, so they brought in Lady Bird Johnson twice; they brought in the cabinet members; they had Hubert Humphrey kick off the Labor Day Parade at Barberton, which is a big thing, and little Frannie McGovern was right on his arm all the time, and I didn't ignore it. Of course, I knew Hubert, and I showed up at City Hall when it was time for the parade to organize and I was in the parade. Of course, they couldn't keep me out of it, as the incumbent congressman. Then John McCormack supposedly sent a wire letting Frances announce the Model Cities Program which turned out to be a fake.

MORRISSEY: Fake telegram?

AYRES: Well, it really hadn't been coordinated,  
and . . .

MORRISSEY: Did you make an issue of that?

AYRES: Well, I made an issue of the fact that I doubted if McCormack sent it because they misspelled his name, and I said, "I don't know what happened on this, but here's the truth of the situation."

Well, then, Lady Bird came to town and I ran an ad which was a picture taken of Lady Bird and myself taken in 1962 when my wife had been presenting some tickets to a Congressional Club benefit to her--this was when Johnson was still vice-president. There were Lady Bird and myself standing there smiling very pleasantly. So I ran this picture in a big ad welcoming her to town. And it really shook them, you know. I said she would find the economy good and the people happy with their representation; if there was anything I could do for her while she was there, to let me know. Well, that kind of shook them.

Then I got wind that Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. was coming out to speak and I had this quote from Jimmy [Roosevelt] when we had been on Nancy Dickerson's--Nancy Hanschman she was then--CBS's Leading Question, where Jimmy had said, "Well, it's impossible to beat Bill Ayres. He's too well entrenched." And I had this great picture of Jimmy and myself. So when Franklin was coming to town I ran this ad--knowing he would be derogatory to me--saying, "Which brother do you believe?" Well, that kind of shook them because the whole thing then turned out with Franklin trying to deny that Jimmy knew what he was talking about. So the brothers got in a fight and I was able to follow that up afterwards.

In the meantime, I found out what time Roosevelt was to arrive and so I arranged to ride out from Washington on the same plane with him. I just had a hunch that McGovern had never met him and figured she'd be at the plane there in Cleveland to meet him. This was a very embarrassing situation for everybody concerned except me. [Laughter.] We walked off the plane and Frances was standing right there. She could have died when she saw me. I said, "Hello, Frances. I want you to meet my friend Franklin Roosevelt." She said, "Oh, hello. How are you?" She was a very nervous person anyway. And Franklin was trying to explain to her that, you know, we just bumped into each other on the plane. I said, "I presume you have transportation down." Well, I saw the Firestone plane just, oh, a hundred feet away, and I figured that they were going to fly him down to Akron. I didn't want to interfere, you know, and have them say I was pushy or anything. Of course, if I had walked over there, Firestone couldn't have said no to me if I'd wanted to get on the plane. But that would

[AYRES] have been too much; I had already accomplished my purpose. There was all this confusion, with a couple of fellows, who were from Firestone to greet Roosevelt, trying to hide [laughter] because they had to be nice to McGovern since she was in the state legislature. I could understand that. It didn't bother me in the least.

They started over to the plane and I headed for the telephone. That year we had a portable billboard that said, "KEEP AYRES IN CONGRESS," and we had a truck with a trailer hitch. We could pull that thing anywhere. So, realizing that they'd be flying down there, I got on the phone and got my headquarters and I said, "Get that billboard out to the airport right away. They'll be coming into Municipal Airport and they'll be there probably within a half hour. But get it out there at the main gate where they've got to walk by it when they get off the plane." Well, as luck would have it, my man was on the ball and he got the traveling billboard out there, and they had to stumble around that "KEEP AYRES IN CONGRESS" as they got off the Firestone plane.

MORRISSEY: Did you get some photographs of that?

AYRES: Well, the press mentioned it. But then the best part about it was Franklin at the luncheon. I had a stooge there, and I made sure Franklin saw this ad. And he really lost his cool. He got up—"Look what this Ayres has stooped to, misquoting my brother." Well, I was all prepared. I knew Franklin pretty well and he could lose his cool; he could get a little hot-headed, and I could tell on the way out of the plane that he wasn't happy about this assignment anyway. But then he saw he'd been outmaneuvered by some of the things that were happening to him getting off the plane, my introducing him to the gathering, stumbling over the billboard. But I was all prepared for him. And the press, of course, picked this up—"Ayres Accused of Misquoting Roosevelt." Well, I had this--CBS at that time used to give you a record of the program. I had it, and that night in the news, with Franklin Roosevelt denying it, here is Jimmy's voice coming on. Then the next day, "Franklin Roosevelt Proved Wrong By Ayres," and then the exact quote, and how Ayres had played this on the radio on the news broadcast. The news guys were very cooperative—"Well, yes, this is great. We've got a big fight going on here." Poor McGovern hardly got her picture in the paper. [Laughter.]

So then Liz Carpenter came to town with Lady Bird--it's always dangerous to go in on the other fellow's turf. I don't care how many advance people you have out, it's his town, or at least he knows his way around there. So I found out which suite Liz was going to be in. Liz has

[AYRES] got a good sense of humor, and she's a rather buxom gal, as you know. So I got hold of the hotel manager and I said, "What suite did you put Liz Carpenter in? I've got a little present for her." He said, "What are you going to give Liz Carpenter?" and I said, "Just a little something between friends." He told me, and I got hold of the bell captain. There wasn't any problem of security involved with Liz. With Lady Bird it might have been a little problem. Liz had a nice queen-sized bed in her little suite which was off Lady Bird's, so I had my man--I supervised this myself--we pulled down the spread and on each pillow I put a T-shirt--"Bill Ayres is My Congressman," size 4, smallest size we had, two of them. [Laughter.] Well, Liz told me afterwards, "Well, that really shook me up. I didn't know what to expect next." [Laughter.] She said, "I didn't dare tell Lady Bird about it until we left town because everyplace we went I wondered, 'Well, what's going to hit us this time'?" First it was the ad, which they all saw, and then when Liz pulled down the covers and saw the shirts, she thought, "How in the hell did he get in here?" So, you know; you have to have a little fun along with it, too. It was constructive. The name of the game is to shake them up a little bit and that's what we tried to do.

[END SIDE 1, TAPE II  
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE II]

[AYRES] So, we survived the '64. When Barry Goldwater, who was my good friend whom I admired but I knew couldn't win, came to town it was a rather ticklish situation, because I knew that he would draw at least six thousand people in an auditorium that would be filled with dedicated people and I had to have those six thousand people. But I didn't dare let them tie me in with Goldwater to the extent that Ayres was just like Goldwater in his voting, although our voting records were very similar. So I made the decision that I had to introduce Goldwater at this group because if I didn't, they would say, "Why not?" If I didn't, Barry would wonder, "Why is Ayres leaving me?"

At that time my son was in the navy in the Vietnam War, and I introduced Barry and said that I would be proud to have him the commander-in-chief of my son who was serving in Vietnam. Well, that gave me a chance to work that in and at the same time bring out Barry's military background. Then the next day I had arranged for a big ad in the Akron Beacon Journal in which I ran a picture of Johnson and myself, which had been taken sometime prior, and a picture of Goldwater and myself, saying, "I can serve you as your congressman with either of these men." And it sort of took the play about Ayres having introduced Goldwater. It made a few of the people a little disturbed,

[AYRES] but then I was just able to say to them, "Look, Goldwater will lose this district by fifty thousand. If you want me to go down the drain with him, then just force the issue." And it would have happened that way if we hadn't played it just as we did.

So then I was able to say in the last couple weeks of the campaign, "Look at the people they have sent in here." Roosevelt, the Johnsons, the Lady Birds, what was the cabinet member--Luther Hodges. He was secretary of commerce then. There were several others who came. "Why do they want me out of there? What am I doing so badly? It's never been heard of. Doesn't the president of the United States have better things to do? Can't he sit down there and figure out how to end the Vietnam War? Does he have to come out here and tell you to defeat your congressman just because I oppose his policies? Is he so right that he should try to prove you wrong?" People told me, "Well, that is dirty pool." "My kid got drafted last week. What the hell's he doing out here in Akron fighting Billy?" "What's Lady Bird doing parading down the street?" "And who's this woman, McGovern?"

Well, I figured that I didn't dare debate Frances because--not that she would get known. She was as well-known as I was. She was well-financed, plenty of money.

MORRISSEY: Labor money?

AYRES: Labor money. But if I were to debate Frances it would get to the point . . . she wasn't a particularly forceful person--and I could be if I wanted to be--but I might get to the point where she would become the underdog and Bill's picking on her. But I figured there had to be one confrontation and it had to be in at least a neutral group where you wouldn't get the boozing and the hissing and the hollering and the drunks in the audience.

One of the fellows at the Akron Beacon Journal was very friendly to Frances and he kept saying, "Well, what are you going to do? We want to get you two together. Why don't you debate her?" So finally I said to him, "Bob," --Bob Stouffer was his name. He's since deceased-- nice fellow. He'd been a good friend of mine but he just thought Frances was an able person. I said, "Okay, Bob. I'll have one meeting." I said, "You belong to the Rotary Club," --big downtown Rotary Club, about three hundred members--I said, "If you want me to appear with Frances before the Rotary Club, okay." He said, "Great." Well, of course, that would make him look good with the Rotarians and accomplish his purpose.

So they set it up, and Frances thought she was going to be in there for the kill. The only thing she kept talking about was my voting record on the basis of

[AYRES] the number of votes that I had missed. And I had been at the International Labor Organization conference in Geneva that year and the crazy Congress had fifty votes in the two weeks that I was gone. Nothing very important, but that didn't make any difference because the percentage was still there. No way to answer that. So, knowing that she was going to hit that very strong, I figured up all of the quorum calls and everything else we had which are called the Call of the House. My percentage, of course, was much higher than hers was, but I wasn't going to make that the issue. I was just going to drop it in--"Well, Frances hasn't read the book right, you know." I had these big black voting books "if she'd care to look these over. But I can understand why she doesn't understand it. She's never been there. And this isn't run like the state legislature." So, in that debate, the way the drawings came off, she got to go first for ten minutes and then I had to use all of my fifteen minutes at one crack and then she got the last five minutes.

Well, she wasn't much of a debater because all through her presentation she kept giving questions that I should answer during my time. And I just completely ignored it, just completely ignored it, and went on with what I had prepared. And they had been running some pretty dirty campaign ads. She had an advertising agency that went a little beyond the normal call. And the Rotarians had a number of these people out in the audience that I had done favors for. There was one fellow there who was a small businessman and I was able to say, "Well, the thing that perhaps Frances ought to understand is . . . you remember, Mr. Robb, when we got the loan that permitted you to keep your business going and now you employ 120 people? That's what a congressman is for, not to sit up here and ask a lot of silly questions that have no bearing on the operation of this community or the economy. You know, Reverend Harvey, what it means when you're trying to get up people to tour Israel and you can't get the visas. You know what that means. I'm afraid Frances doesn't understand it because she didn't have that problem in the state legislature." I went on down the line for fifteen minutes.

Well, I closed it off, hitting the dirty part of the campaign and, of course, I had mentioned the Johnsons coming and so forth. And then I said, "You know, there's an old saying, and I don't say that Frances is responsible for this directly, but indirectly she is, because she has permitted this advertising agency to run these ads. And some of them are so rough that I happen to know," I said, "that Ben Maidenberg," who was the managing editor of the Beacon Journal, "You know this, Ben. You debated as an editorial policy whether or not these ads

[AYRES] should be permitted in your clean family hometown newspaper. But, Frances, I'd just like to say this to you, even though I don't hold you directly responsible. The old saying is this: "He who throws dirt loses much ground." I sat down. She was almost in tears. She was dropping her notes--"Well, he didn't answer any of my questions." And then she repeated all these questions that these Rotarians could have cared less about. They don't care whether you missed ten roll calls in one week. So afterwards, Stouffer, who had arranged all this, was sort of apologizing to Frances for having done it. Well, that was the end of the campaign because the word spread and the newsman wrote the story up, you know, "McGovern was nervous," and "Ayres stuck to his record."

MORRISSEY: Had you debated in college?

AYRES: Yes.

MORRISSEY: I'm not surprised to learn that.

AYRES: I had done a lot of debating. In fact, we had a Professor Woodward, who was very interested in debate techniques, and in order to give the students some experience, he had made arrangements with the Judicial Review Committee in Cleveland, where I went to Western Reserve University, to have us go out and speak for various judges who were running, at the little nationality meetings and group meetings.

MORRISSEY: Interesting.

AYRES: It was very interesting. I suppose if I had any inclination toward politics, it might have come there, but I got into my own thing, so to speak, and didn't pursue it for almost ten years or so. The first judge that I was assigned to speak for was a fellow running for municipal judge--I believe this was in 1934--was Frank Lausche.

MORRISSEY: Is that right?

AYRES: And that's when I first met Frank. He heard through one of his representatives that this fellow, Ayres, from the university--young kid, seventeen, eighteen years old--had given quite a spiel on how important it was to have a judge who understood his people. I had done a little homework on Lausche and the Slovenians, and so forth and so on.

MORRISSEY: Was the classroom exercise to develop a skill of giving a partisan speech for a judicial candidate?

AYRES: No. The purpose of it was, of course, to give us public experience in speaking before a crowd. But actually, I think what Prof. Woodward had in mind was having us do a lot of research on the person so that we could brief our facts and key it to the particular audience.

For instance, if we went before a teachers' group advocating this judge, we found out what the judge had done in the field of education and how he would be fair and so forth and so on.

MORRISSEY: Would you always speak only on one side of the judge's candidacy?

AYRES: No, but we just spoke for one judge.

MORRISSEY: I see.

AYRES: We were assigned to cover meetings and some of them were speaking for councilmen, but I happened to be assigned a judge--Lausche. I was quite thrilled. Lausche won. And then, of course, he went on to be mayor and governor and senator. We're still friends today.

MORRISSEY: I had never heard . . .

AYRES: We had something else in common, too. Both of us had played semi-professional ball.

MORRISSEY: Baseball?

AYRES: Mmm. And I had picked that up in Lausche's background. Then I was able to tie that in, tie some analogies in with baseball, you know, "Lausche will know when there's a curve being thrown at him."

MORRISSEY: I had never heard of that being done as an academic exercise for undergraduates. That sounds like a wonderful idea.

AYRES: Oh, it was. And you could only do it, of course, in a large municipality, but . . . and as I recall, the political figures were quite pleased with it.

I do know there was one fellow there who got a little taken away, and out of the whole group I think there was only one on whom Professor Woodward got the word back, "Don't send him out anymore." I've got a very nice letter that's around someplace from Lausche, when he was just a lawyer--that's when he was first running for judge, thanking me for . . . But I didn't know anything. I was only eighteen years old, didn't understand what it was all about, except that it was fun to go out and meet people . . . and, of course, I got an A in the course, so that was helpful, too.

MORRISSEY: Going back to Frances McGovern, when an incumbent congressman runs against a woman, does that cause your whole strategy to get adjusted?

AYRES: I think it depends on the woman. Frances McGovern was no Bella Abzug. If you had a Bella Abzug, I think you could get tough and nasty and rough and put her right on an equal with you. But when you've got Frances McGovern, a frail little maiden lady, but in her late thirties, you've got to be a little careful. She was highly regarded and she's very much a lady, very quiet and very mild-mannered. It would depend entirely on the type of woman it is. But you've got some women today out on the stump whom you can just take on just as rough--and if you don't, they'll figure you're a pussyfoot.

MORRISSEY: One reason I ask is that I recall from the Bailey account of your first campaign, you did have a lot of volunteer support from Republican Women or League of Women Voters, that type of constituents.

AYRES: We had a lot of women. I think the reason we got them was that they had worked so long for candidates and never had any winners. But I was able to leave the impression, we can win if we do this. And it got them thinking, "Well, here's a chance to win one," and we did get a lot of support from the women.

But I was concerned with Frances, as I said. That's the reason I made the determination not to get on a public platform with her more than once, because that's all you needed. And she did just exactly what I was hoping she would do and that was to fall apart, particularly before this group of Rotarians who said, "My God, if she doesn't get her way, she goes into a corner crying. How's this district going to survive with that type of representation?"

MORRISSEY: You seemed to be very sensitive towards the dangers of overkill in a political campaign.

AYRES: Oh, I think that's a very, very dangerous thing.

MORRISSEY: Do you think it's because of your own district? You had a lot of sensitivities there to balance. Or is it just a generalization that applies to congressional politics?

AYRES: I think that applies in general. The public, whether they're blue collar or white collar, are very much aware of what is fair, and if you try to take advantage of the situation, it can boomerang. I think that in that McGovern campaign there was definitely an overkill with all of the administration people coming in against me. I don't

[AYRES] think it would have been as much had I not pointed it out, you know, and let them know, "What's going on here?"---just leave a little bit of doubt in their minds, because I was wondering myself, "I haven't done this much to hurt Johnson." Not yet I hadn't. Later on in the next session of Congress when he had the poverty program and all the rest of his stuff in there, and Sarge Shriver running the show, it did get a little rough. But Johnson learned to have a little respect for my positions, because we were down at the White House many a time. Adam Powell, chairman of the Education and Labor Committee, would say, "Come on down. The president wants to see us." I was ranking minority member. And he [Johnson] would say, "What are you going to do to us on this, Ayres?" And I'd tell him. I said, "I'm going to be more successful than you were when you came out to Akron last year, Mr. President, and said, 'Where's this little girl I'm going to get elected.'" I said, "Yeah, you got her elected, didn't you?"

MORRISSEY: Did you say that?

AYRES: Sure. That's the only thing he understood. The only thing Lyndon Johnson understood was when somebody would talk up to him. Otherwise he'd blow you right down the trap.

MORRISSEY: Was he offended by that?

AYRES: No, no. He appreciated the fact that you had a sense of humor and understood what he was trying to do.

MORRISSEY: Well, what happened in '70? How did it all come to an end?

AYRES: Well, there were several things there. One was that the labor people finally decided that they couldn't beat me by drumming up support on issues where I had voted against the labor positions, because I had built too much strength with the working people on the service angle, things that we had done there. So they took a different approach. First, they figured that they would get an accepted, highly-regarded, respected name, and they went all out for John Seiberling in the primaries, and John is . . .

MORRISSEY: Did they go looking for him, or did he come to them?

AYRES: No, they went looking for him. In fact, they tried to clear the primary but were unsuccessful in doing so. But it was very apparent to me that John would

[AYRES] win the primary. The mistake that I probably made was not taking John on in debates . . .

MORRISSEY: Oh, really?

AYRES: . . . because there again they say, "Don't debate your opponent because you're just giving him publicity," but the name Seiberling was so well-known in Akron that you couldn't have made it any better known by having a debate with John. Then, I think I could have forced out the issues. But I decided against that, which, in retrospect, as I say, was probably a mistake. I didn't feel that I could get the audiences for the debate. And you couldn't do it on television because we didn't have the coverage there that would be fair audiences. There would be the booing and there'd be stacked audiences--you get your crowd there and I'll get my crowd there. And it would just wind up in a hassle. Being a Democratic area, John probably would get the better of the hand. So, I decided against that and went the route of emphasizing the service and the seniority and my close connections with things that I could get done with Nixon. Now, I don't say that tying yourself up with a president who perhaps isn't popular in your district--because Nixon, of course, never carried it--was the whole thing. I underestimated the feeling of the young people in our area--and when I say young, I mean those thirty and under--that to them, I was the old man who had been there a long time. I underestimated their feeling toward the Vietnam war, the campus unrest, and permitted myself--which I don't blame anybody for but myself--to fall into the Agnew line of law and order which I made my approach. I was critical of the people who burned down Kent State which was in our area.

MORRISSEY: It's not in your district, though, is it?

AYRES: No, but it had been, and an awful lot of the people in the Akron area attended Kent or had relatives who did. Then the same thing spread over to the University of Akron, and John Seiberling took a very strong position pro-student and I took just as strong a position anti-student, and the feeling was just switching enough that it made the difference. In retrospect, if I had dissociated myself from Nixon and criticized him on the Cambodian situation and said the kids had a right to rebel because nobody was paying any attention to them, it probably could have made the difference, because those kids got out and voted that year. I shouldn't say kids, young people, and I think it made the difference and John capitalized on it, much to his political credit. But issues weren't the thing: you couldn't see how they could switch from a voting record like mine to what John's has been since he

[AYRES] got here [to Washington] and the things that he's advocated in the Congress. And people knew the name. He went in with a good clean name. It appealed to the right element with the normal Democratic vote and he got those Independents that I might have gotten but didn't get because of my position with Nixon and Agnew.

MORRISSEY: Did you see it coming?

AYRES: Yes. In fact, the night before we went over to the election party--my family was all there--I said, "Now the toughest thing about tonight is going to be the letdown for our workers, because they have no idea that this is going to happen." But my polls, which had been very accurate in the past, showed that it was awfully, awfully close, with us trailing slightly. And then after--I didn't go over to the headquarters until after about ten precincts were in--selected precincts that I knew--so then I said to my son, I said, "Come on. Let's go on over. Keep your chin up, but it's all over." And this was only when about fifteen thousand votes were in. But I knew those precincts from years gone by. That was the key.

MORRISSEY: Do you have a feeling, with the exception of the things you said about the hard line, the Agnew viewpoint, and so forth, do you have a feeling that there was a certain inevitability about the way the tide was running? I sense that you do, just hearing you describe this.

AYRES: Well . . .

MORRISSEY: Let me put it more specifically. What do you think was causing the difference in those key precincts that you had carried?

AYRES: Well, it wasn't the fact that we had carried them; it was how much we lost them by. I knew the percentages in the precincts. Well, it was a general trend. We didn't lose any areas overwhelmingly; it was just a drop every place which, in analyzing it,--which I didn't spend a whole lot of time doing--, but just from a quick analysis, I saw was just enough to make the difference. The eight thousand votes would have made the difference and it didn't take much of an issue. And, of course, they had all of these--they did do a good job. They brought in these young people from all over the country.

MORRISSEY: Oh, really?

AYRES: Oh, yes. They had two or three hundred people there going door to door, and the only dirty part about the campaign was that John had--and I don't say that John did this, it may have been just the general PR [public relations] thing that they've had. They were trying to downplay the office, that I had lost interest in the people, that I wasn't coming home as much, and they would go door to door and say, "How long has it been since you've seen Bill Ayres?" You know, that sort of thing. And, of course, we don't see ten percent of the people. They'd say, "Well, maybe he has been there too long. Twenty years is a long time." Then a kid would come to the door and say, "I wasn't even born when Bill Ayres was running for Congress. What can he do for me?" You keep dropping that often enough and a little bit of it catches on.

But had I been debating John--and John wasn't that much younger--he is only a couple of years younger than I am--if we'd had those debates, I think John would have lost his cool. He's inclined to . . . he gets a little nervous. And if I had just taken the bills that I'd passed, and the service, and read the letters of the people we'd helped, and debated him half a dozen times with the right audience. . . . If I could have gotten all the Rotary clubs and Kiwanis clubs, that sort of thing. Of course, they wouldn't agree to that. They wanted open debates which they--he challenged me on it--open debates in a high school auditorium where everybody could come. But my people wouldn't come over, but the labor guys would have all stacked every meeting.

[END SIDE 2, TAPE II  
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE III]

MORRISSEY: Is it hard for a congressman who's been in for twenty years to reconcile himself to being out?

AYRES: For the first few months it is, because you're all of a sudden in a position where there are things that you think of that you'd like to do, or things you'd like to say that aren't going to have any impact and you figure, "Well, I no longer have the privileges of the floor and the debates and the issuing of press releases, because nobody gives a damn."

MORRISSEY: But did you think of running again? The way Walter Huber had run against you?

AYRES: Oh, no. No. The point that I had made, or tried to make, in '70, was that I had finally reached the point in the Congress where my voice was listened to because of the years of experience that the people had provided me. And "if you want to sacrifice that experience

[AYRES] for someone new"--and I did use this on John-- "someone that will be seventy-five years old before they have the same experience that I have at fifty-four,-- I'm still young enough to do the job and old enough and experienced enough to know the job . . ." So to start over would be to do it without seniority in the Congress, even though in '72 I might have been able to defeat John, because he hadn't established himself. He had become very, very liberal, too much for a lot of the West Virginians. If I had wanted to go back and exploit it . . . and with [George] McGovern running and with the Nixon sweep and my close ties to Nixon--Nixon still at that point being popular, to the point that you recall he carried all the states, except Massachusetts and the District, I might have won it. But, by having been defeated, I would have lost the ability to do the things that I wanted to do. I would no longer have been ranking member, would have been almost at the bottom of the committees, although longevity-wise we would still have the office in the Rayburn Building and perform the services for the people. But my legislative status and control of the staff that I had gotten through Adam Clayton Powell's cooperation with me on the Education and Labor Committee would have all been gone. So, by asking the people to send me back I would have been repudiating, actually, the very thing that I asked them to keep me there for in '70.

So I made the decision, before we left to go over to the headquarters that election night, and announced that evening that this was the end of a congressional career, that I would not be running again. A lot of people said, "Oh, that's terrible," you know, because they always figure, "Well, we'll get them next time." But to start out again at my age, new, to survive another twenty years until I was seventy-five seemed impossible. The so-called prestige--if you want to term it that--of being a member of Congress actually never affected me. I never lost being Bill Ayres, not Congressman Ayres as much as Bill Ayres, personalizing it, and enjoying things that I could do and the constructive things that I could do in the way of legislation, with a challenge to the president. That phase of it I enjoyed. But as far as having lost the prestige of being a member of Congress, that didn't bother me. And, of course, the other thing I think that helped in any readjustment that had to be made was that I was thrown into a job that Nixon asked me to take, directing the Jobs for Veterans program across the country which gave me an opportunity to do some of the very same things in the field of veterans that I had always been proposing in the Congress. In fact, the Beacon Journal editorialized

[AYRES]: after Nixon appointed me to this position that it might have been a blessing in disguise for the country because if there was one field that Ayres had expertise in, it was in this field of veterans' benefits and veterans' rights and so forth, having hired all veterans when I started my business, and having been on the committee for twenty years, ranking member for ten. So that part of it was very easy.

I presume it was a greater letdown to me personally after what happened to Nixon, my good, close, personal friend, who wouldn't listen to anybody in the latter days--which didn't have to be the latter days had he listened to some of his friends. That was probably a greater period of adjustment for me, and also the demise of Agnew, because supporters in my district had a nice testimonial dinner for me in December of '70 and Agnew was the speaker. And I couldn't believe that this man that I admired could have been involved in something as petty as taking kickbacks. I could believe that Nixon would be capable of thinking that the country was better served for him covering up what part he had in Watergate than I could Agnew taking patty cash, so to speak. But I knew that this Nixon thing was coming. In fact, I recommended that after Agnew's resignation, Jerry Ford be named vice-president. He was my candidate, and I made it very strong in letters and calls including a personal call to the president, because even at that point I felt confident, and it hurt to feel it, that Nixon could not possibly survive. I knew Nixon well enough to know that he was more involved, because Nixon, by nature, couldn't have something like that going on without being involved. He's too curious. He would have to know everything. And at Jerry Ford's son's wedding, which my wife and I were invited to, at the reception Jerry was sitting at the end of the table, sort of by himself, and I walked over and pulled up a chair and said, "Mr. Vice-President, if I were you I'd start making preparations to be president." He said, "Oh, I don't dare to think about that, Bill. Don't dare to think about that." I said, "It's going to happen." And this was July. It didn't take long. And I said, "You and I both know the president. This thing is too far down the line." Then I told him about a meeting that he wasn't aware of that they had called down at the White House of some of Nixon's old friends, right after the court had ruled that the tapes could not be kept secret. Well, then, of this group of people that were there, I was the only one who wasn't an attorney, and I spoke up and . . . Alexander Haig was there and the counsel from Massachusetts . . .

MORRISSEY: Cox?

AYRES: No. The president's counsel. It wasn't Smith . . . the name . . . can't think of it . . . the name slips me. And these other friends . . .

MORRISSEY: Eliot Richardson?

AYRES: No. No. Nixon's counsel.

MORRISSEY: Oh, James St. Clair.

AYRES: James St. Clair. And they had the transcripts of what they had released in these great bound copies which they thought were making a great impression on the Judiciary Committee. So I asked St. Clair (not being an attorney I could ask stupid questions), I said, "Well, what is on the tapes that you don't want the court to release?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Well, then, gentlemen, I would just as leave--excuse myself--because the ball game is over. If there hasn't been enough confidence for you to know what's on those tapes, then there's something on there . . .

MORRISSEY: Was Nixon present during this?

AYRES: No, no. "That even the president didn't want you to see. I don't see anything at all that can save the situation."

MORRISSEY: And what was the reaction to your comment?

AYRES: Dead silence for a moment, and then, "Well, we've got this and that and the other thing." Several of us tried to get the word to Nixon right after the election in '72, that whatever the truth is, tell it now after this great victory, let it all hang out, because it's going to come out since you've got this Democratic Congress, and I guess everybody felt they could keep the lid on. But I'll always feel that if he had taken to the airways and said, "Here's what I have learned. . . ." But whether or not he was so deeply involved that those that he would have pointed the finger at would have turned on him, I don't know. But it wasn't done, as we all know, and we now know the really sad results, not only from the personal point of view, but from the historical point of view and what it did to the prestige of this country and how it changed all of history.

MORRISSEY: What's the root of your friendship with Nixon? He was in the Senate when you first came to the House.

AYRES: That came about because of my Life magazine story. Nixon was also a member of the Chowder and Marching group which was organized in the 81st Congress by a group of people who were fighting a veteran's pension bill and each year they took in two new members, or they kept it up to where they had fifteen Republican House members and this particular year of '51, they had two so-called vacancies in the House membership of the Chowder and Marching Society. Nixon had seen the Life magazine story. I had never met him until then, and I got this call from Rosemary Woods, or it could have been Dottie Cox, who was working with him. But, anyway, I got the call from Nixon's office saying that he would like to meet me. Well, I felt quite highly honored, and also, Congressman Potter of Michigan, who was a congressman then, he wasn't yet a senator, also wanted to meet with me.

Nixon was just curious as to how I made the Life magazine, freshman congressman getting a spread like that, and Potter wanted to get better acquainted with me because my name had been suggested, having defeated a liberal Democrat who no one thought could be unseated, to become a member of the Chowder and Marching group. But in the Chowder and Marching group, some of them were furious with me, being the new member, because I voted wrong on the first vote in the House, from their conservative point of view, on the continuation of the rules that had been established in the 81st Congress, the 21-day rule. I figured, you know, why give all this power--I'm a new guy--why give all this power to the Rules Committee? I'm not going to have a voice, so I voted with the minority, which was the anti-Republican stance. I voted with the Democrats. As it turned out it was the minority, but the majority position was to change the rules and they weren't too happy with that, except Jerry Ford, and Jerry Ford had voted the same way in the 81st Congress. So he could understand why I felt that way.

I overcame that primarily because of Nixon, who had been replaced in the House by Pat Hillings of California, and Pat and I . . . Pat was the youngest member and I was the second youngest member. We kidded each other. We got very well acquainted in the first week in the Congress. In fact, it was Pat who told me what Chowder and Marching was. I had never heard that before. No one else had, to my knowledge. It was just a group that got together which has turned out to be a wonderful thing. So Pat was saying, you know, "You ought to get into this," and he was telling me all about it because he was pushing for it and Nixon was pushing for him. So I knew that much about it when Nixon called and wanted to meet me. I went over to his office and we discussed the Life story and I told him

[AYRES] how it all came about and he was quite intrigued, very, very interested. It was quite a deal. He said, "Oh, you've got a good future here," and "You just keep up that kind of thing."

Then after I was accepted in the Chowder and Marching, it became my turn to entertain. They meet once a week. And they kidded me about this considerably: I had a policy in my heating company office that we didn't do any partying or anything in the office. And I was carrying that same policy along, no drinks in the office, in the congressional office. So when it came my turn to entertain, I rented a little room on the ground floor of the Congressional Hotel and entertained them over there. Well, I soon got out of that policy because of the cost. But Nixon came that first time that I was the host. I had gone out to talk to an open forum--and there again the tape recorder came in--on price controls, the elimination of price controls. I thought this would be of interest to my new colleagues, so I brought the tape back and my part of the entertainment was to play a little bit of the tape. Well, Nixon was really intrigued with that, to hear the tape recorder. Later a tape recorder killed him. And he wanted to know all about that: "How did you do this?" I said, "Well, I just had a mike wired out in the audience and it came through the tape machine and every question was heard and then my answer. And everybody was anxious to get their questions in. And then, if there were any questions afterwards, I have a record of exactly what I had said." In fact, it came out pretty handy because the newspaper wrote an editorial in which they had misquoted me, and I was able to rerun them the tape and they had to run a retraction on it, acknowledging that they had misquoted me.

Then, one of the questions and the manner in which I answered it, Nixon was quite pleased with. The other fellows were getting a little nervous with my wasting all this time and they wanted another drink and another sandwich. So one fellow, who turned out to be a very good friend later, Don Jackson, he said, "Oh, shut that god-damned thing off." Nixon said, "No. Leave it on." He said, "That's what's wrong with you fellows, you don't realize what it is, or what district he had, and that's just what he's doing it for." But then we did shut it off. Nixon stayed and listened to the rest of it after the meeting broke up. I walked back to his Senate office with him, and then over the years I met with him casually. He was always very helpful to me, very cooperative.

I used to bring a lot of Republican women from my district into town every spring and he would always meet